

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Tunisia: Slandering Media Campaign against Tunisian Human Rights Defenders and Journalists

The weekly newspaper KOLL ENNASS, published in Arabic in Tunis, has three times lashed out at Tunisian human rights defenders and journalists. Kamel JENDOUBI, Sihem BENSEDRINE and Slim BAGGA have been accused of being Israeli agents allegedly pursued by some 'Palestinian factions'.

The Tunisian authorities appear in reality behind these completely fanciful and slanderous accusations meant to discredit peaceful opponents and provide a ready-made justification for possible further acts of violence.

The undersigned organizations are concerned that such articles are part of a larger smear campaign seeking to undermine legitimate and peaceful criticism of the Tunisian authorities. Recent months have witnessed an escalation of attacks, including physical assaults and abusive prosecution against peaceful critics in Tunisia.

We denounce such threats against men and women whose only wrong is to ask for respect for human rights in their country. We are all the more concerned that the complaints for defamation lodged by Kamel Jendoubi and Sihem Bensedrine have so far been disregarded by the Tunisian authorities.

We are urging the Tunisian authorities to ensure the personal safety of all human rights defenders and other activists in Tunisia and that those responsible for any violence used against them will be held accountable.

We fear that such acts of intimidation and violence might occur outside Tunisia as well, and we therefore call on the French and all other European Governments to take the necessary steps to make clear to President Ben Ali's Government that such attacks will not be tolerated, whether in Tunisia or on their own territory.

Signatories

The Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights

Al-Haq

Amnesty International

Cairo Institute for Human Rights

Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies

Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network

International Federation for Human rights

Lebanese Center for Human Rights

Ligue française des droits de l'Homme

World Organization against Torture

Public Document

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